

Open Letter from the Mayor No. 16

Well, we did it. The Chichester vaccine centre will be at the Westgate Centre. I emphasise **we**, because the people of Chichester made this happen through our many calls, emails and letters. The avalanche of pressure meant I was given a direct line to the NHS Commissioner, who listened and acted on your concerns. I haven't seen such a local campaign since the attempt to shut down St Richard's A&E. A march to Priory Park would have been difficult during lockdown and in any case it has been a little nippy for venturing outside. I just hope that Chichester won't be at the back of the queue again.

At one stage I thought that the Mayoress and I would be the last people in England to receive the Jab. Our NHS letters arrived, but, after seeing the mass vaccination centres on offer - including the Isle of Wight! - we elected to wait for the GP centre to be finalised. Travelling a distance in icy conditions didn't fit well with a stay-at-home message.

So we waited. And waited. But the telephone remained silent. On the surgery website it stated if you hadn't been contacted you should email the local NHS catch-up team (ipc.covidcatchupchichester@nhs.net). If you are over 70, in the top four priority groups and have not had your jab, do use this facility. We did so and it worked perfectly. Within a few hours Emily had booked us into Selsey at noon the next day.

I know many of you have experienced the smooth, efficient and friendly operation at the centres. Better still, I was recognised by the volunteer, Fiona, who introduced us to the doctor as Mayor and Mayoress. I apologised for not wearing the chain: I thought it would get in the way when bearing my arm.

By 12.25 we had finished our 15-minute wait and were out of the back door with what Tony Hancock would have called 'an armful' of the Pfizer vaccine - and a profound sense of relief.

Apparently, the Selsey centre had done more than 8,000 jabs since it started. Apart from a slight sore arm, we have had no side effects. Some who were given the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine have had an uncomfortable night, but were fine in the morning. Either vaccine will do what we want it to do: prevent serious illness and death due to Covid-19 and the new variants. The vaccine roll-out has been a success. Thank goodness the Government left it to the frontline NHS and the logistics to the military. Unfortunately the parallel systems - local GP practice centre and the NHS national scheme of mass vaccination centre and pharmacies - have caused much confusion.

All in all, the past week has been a good one. A special meeting of the City Council decided to confer the Freedom of the City on Philip Jackson, the internationally renowned sculptor. Later, we had the announcement of the prestigious Civic and Community Awards. Like many current events it has to be adapted to lockdown. So it is in three parts: a Zoom

meeting for the citation; a personal presentation of the medal and a certificate to each recipient; and finally, when we are able to do so, a full reception for all civic award holders, past and present. So far, parts one and two seem to have gone well, but it is difficult to guess when we might welcome 120 guests to the Assembly Room.

In my last letter, the question was 'Have you had your jab yet?' This has given way to 'Have you booked a holiday yet?' Our answer is that the Mayoress and I have booked a cottage in the Yorkshire Dales in early September – with fingers tightly crossed.

Talking of Zoom meetings, the highlight has to be the American lawyer with the kitten mask and a loose grip on the technology. Coming in a close second was Mrs Jackie Weaver at Handford Parish Council. I laughed out loud. Zooming has become a way of life, but how I miss real contact with the people. As well as Civic Award events, I have attended via Zoom part of a prayer meeting and the 324th dinner of the Wheelbarrow Club; I have opened businesses, and even a housing development, virtually cutting a virtual ribbon! Not to mention the myriad Council meetings, often lasting many hours. Zoom has its place – indeed it has been a lifesaver during the past year - but I understand that the Government will not allow it for Council business after May. Mind you, the Government has a habit of frequently changing its mind.

Meanwhile the **Mayor's Hardship Fund** (Telephone: **07740 621812**) continues to recognise those on whom the pandemic has had a devastating financial impact. It is stepping-up its fundraising and if you can contribute, or need help yourself, please contact me.

I remain optimistic for the future, but am now planning that party I promised for the end of September rather than July.

Richard Plowman, Mayor